# Reviving the Paris Thylacines: Museums, Extinction, and Public Environmental Sentiments

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**Abstract**

This article examines the display of the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) in Paris, focusing on the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Museum of Natural History) and its associated spaces. It will argue that museums are important spaces in which the public comes face-to-face with extinction and can grieve species loss. Building on the notion of museums as a repository for public grief, this article argues that a more complex repertoire of emotions is possible (and invited) in contemporary engagements with extinction. Through examining this complex emotional terrain, this article traces shifting political approaches to extinction and museum display in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** extinction, thylacine, Anthropocene, museum display, natural history

As we grapple with the human impact on the environment in the period now referred to as the Anthropocene, natural history collections are accruing new meaning. Nowhere is this more relevant than in relation to the display of extinct species (see Jørgensen 2019). In this article I consider the thylacine (Tasmanian tiger) and will examine what the display of this carnivorous marsupial in Paris tells us about the potentialities of natural history collections in engaging the public to confront extinction. This article follows various thylacines in Paris: from animals displayed in the Menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes to the specimens held in the museum in a number of galleries and storage facilities Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (Museum of Natural History), to more speculative creatures such as the reanimated thylacine in the augmented reality exhibition 'Revivre' (Revive) staged in the Museum since June 2021, and the fantastical thylacine on the Dodo Manège ('Dodo Carousel'). It looks to these examples to tell a more complex story about museums, and associated public spaces, as locations for encountering extinct animals. This article will argue that museums are an important space in which the public comes face-to-face with extinction and can grieve species loss. But it also argues that a more complex repertoire of emotions is possible (and invited) in contemporary engagements with extinction. In tracing the history of the display of thylacines through this Paris institution, this article also examines the way in which museum display has shifted to become more explicitly political and posthumanist. The article begins with a discussion of this shift before working through a range of examples of thylacines starting with the live thylacines in the Menagerie before looking at the place of thylacines in the museum collection and finally working through more speculative examples. Following the thylacine through the various spaces of this institution will enable us to consider the different ways that extinction is presented and consumed in public as well as highlighting the shifting role of museums in shaping public environmental sentiments.

Thylacines are displayed in museums all around the world as a significant example of extinction. This extinction narrative is now well known. The species once roamed throughout mainland Australia and New Guinea but became extinct outside the small southern island of Tasmania around 3,000 years ago. Falsely believed to be a livestock predator (Paddle 2000),

the thylacine had a government bounty placed on its head and was hunted to extinction by settlers. The last known captive animal died in Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart in 1936. The thylacine was officially declared extinct by the Tasmanian government in 1986 but the animal continues to haunt the popular imagination and thylacine hunters continue their search for the species in the wilderness of Tasmania. In this paper I will focus on a specific set of thylacines in Paris at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle and its related institutions. This is an apposite example because the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle can be seen as a 'museum of museums' according to Claudia Cohen (2018: 128) who writes:

> The Paris Museum remains strongly attached to its own history and culture, with its buildings reflecting the history of the organisation and division of knowledge and the constitution of disciplines. Its specimens tell a story of traveling and collecting, of debates and scientific exchange, of individual ambitions and scholarly networks; and its displays carry the memory of practices involved in ordering objects and of controversies over the classification and history of the living world.

It is also a museum which provides an example of different display practices between the historical Galerie de Paléontologie et d'Anatomie Comparée (Gallery of Palaeontology and Comparative Anatomy) and the more recently renovated Grande Galerie de l'Évolution (Gallery of Evolution). This is a major international collecting institution, and one that has had thylacines in its collection for an exceptionally long time. The International Thylacine Specimen Database (Sleightholme and Ayliffe 2013) records two specimens that are listed as having been acquired prior to 1789 in the museum's collection: distal parts of four limbs and a taxidermy mount. This is potentially the oldest thylacine mount held by any museum and is recorded as being from the cabinet of King Louis XVI. Stephen Sleightholme and Nicholas Ayliffe, the authors of the Database, go on to note that if this provenance is correct, 'the specimen may have been collected as an unidentified curiosity on one of the early French voyages to Van Diemen's Land' (2013: 48-9) although the oldest confirmed record of a thylacine specimen in Europe is 1812 in William Bullock's museum (Sleightholme and Campbell 2018: 490). As an illustrative example, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle shows how institutions both commodify animals and work toward their conservation (both as a living species and through their role as caretakers of their remains).

Museums are not neutral spaces but are inherently political. They shape knowledge and, in the case of natural history collections, can foster environmental sentiments and facilitate public awareness of environmental issues. 'Museums', Fiona Cameron (2016: 26) writes, 'are one of modernity's most emblematic and trusted pedagogical institutions. Recognized as icons of modern critical humanism, they are instrumental in shaping visions of the world, of culture and cultural difference, human relations with nature, technology and science'. As an institution of knowledge, the museum has traditionally confirmed the role of the human as arbiter and organiser of this knowledge. As Cameron (2018: 349) states, 'modes of collecting, ordering and exhibiting are principally understood in terms of human subject/object relations'. When it comes to natural history collections this becomes more overt. Natural history collections, according to Dominic O'Key (2021: 636), have historically presented objects 'as naturalised and thereby neutralised specimens without a history or politics'. This presentation of objects as apolitical elides the way that collecting institutions are shaped by the dominant ideologies of their time, particularly when it comes to the human and their place in the world. It is important to acknowledge that both contemporary and historical displays are political, and that politics is not monolithic. Different times and contexts give rise to different political presentations whether that is about the glory of the King, the dominance of empire, or the place of the human in a changing world. However, more recently scholars such as O'Key and Cameron, as well as Colin Sterling, have marked a shift to posthuman museum practices. Although, as Sterling (2020: 1029-1030) notes, heritage studies has been slow to draw on posthumanism and the nonhuman turn, there has been a decentring of the human as the organiser of meaning which has enabled a shift from a '"people centred" approach to heritage whilst maintaining a clear focus on questions of power and the ethics of critical practice'. At the same time, human responsibility for major events such as climate change and extinction has re-centred the human in narratives that were once thought to be concerned with nature rather

than culture. The stories told by museums about extinction are starting to locate humans as responsible either for the direct termination of a species through targeted activities such as hunting, or indirectly, for example when species extinction is the collateral of human-caused habitat loss. However, museums typically position this responsibility as universal rather than acknowledging, as this article does, that some groups of humans were more responsible for the demise of the thylacine than others. This is consistent with broader approaches to the Anthropocene in which anthropocentrism is acknowledged as one of the major contributing factors to climate change and associated environmental issues, while at the same time the human is centred as causal agent. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009: 201, 207) reminds us, in the Anthropocene we see the collapse of human and natural history.

The history of thylacines in Paris enables us to critically examine shifting practices concerning the display of rare and then extinct animals. In particular, the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, sitting at the top of the Jardin des Plantes, is a wonderful example of a movement away from the dispassionate, taxonomical and 'scientific' organisation of a natural history collection to displays which are deeply concerned with human environmental impact and responsibility. In Stephen Asma's (2003) comparative study of the organisation of major natural history collections he describes the contemporary presentation of natural history at this museum as one which both inspires awe and guilt. He recounts his experience of sections of this museum as a 'thoroughly depressing and heavily moralized tour through the human destruction of nature' (Asma 2003: 172). The Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, reopened to the public after comprehensive renovations in 1994, is not just an example of how natural history collections can be presented within a more explicitly political context, but it also demonstrates the potential of the museum as an affective site for public emotions. This museum invites us to consider how affect can be mobilised by museums to elicit complex responses to extinction and create greater and more political engagement with extinction as one of the great problems that faces us today.

It may at first seem incongruous to find thylacines in Paris. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thylacines were captured, transported, and displayed in a range of zoos outside of Tasmania including within Australia in Adelaide and Melbourne, and internationally in London, Liverpool, Berlin, Paris, Cologne, Antwerp, Washington, and New York. The fraught nature of the shipping and acclimatisation of these animals can be seen in the case of the London Zoo, which displayed the first thylacine outside of Australia. Between the arrival of the first thylacine in 1850 and the death of the last in 1931, 25 animals were transported to London, five arriving dead and one dying eight days after landing. After their deaths, some of these animals were traded with other European institutions and many found their way into museum collections such as the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, the Zoological Institute in Stockholm, and the Natural History Museum in London (Sleightholme and Ayliffe 2013). The movement of thylacine remains between the zoo and the museum complemented the existing trade of thylacine remains between the Antipodes and imperial powers. In 1886 a pair of live thylacines (one male and one female) were donated to the Menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes from the Melbourne Zoo. They made this perilous journey from Australia to Europe, transiting through the London Zoo for several weeks and arriving on the 17th of April.

The Menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes is a particularly apt site for considering the display of exoticised animals. The spectacular gardens, originally opened as a medicinal herb garden by Louis XIII in 1626, was formerly known as the King's Garden before opening to the public in 1650. The collection of the Menagerie was originally from Versailles where Louis XIV had assembled and displayed many exotic and rare animals. In their history of the zoo as an institution Eric Baratay and Elisabeth Hardouin-Fugier (2002: 51) comment on the extravagance of this display and its ideological function:

> The menagerie's purpose was therefore to celebrate the King in all his glory. By its exceptional nature it illustrates, as did the rest of Versailles, his majesty and power, his ascendency over the nobility and his subjects, his prestige and his supremacy over foreign powers. But it also exhausted his power over the universe.

After the French Revolution, the Menagerie at Versailles was perceived as decadent and the

animals were either eaten, released, or taken to the Jardin des Plantes for public display in 1793, after it was nationalised with the establishment of the National Museum of Natural History (Pouillard 2019: 15). Although the post-revolutionary zoo in the Jardin des Plantes was now publicly accessible, it still sustained many of the ideological functions of the royal Menagerie. Moreover, it maintained its important imperial function so that while the post-revolutionary Menagerie was not as ostentatious as Versailles it continued to demonstrate the power of the ruling class, and their colonial might. 'The capturing of animals,' John Berger (2007: 259) writes, 'was a symbolic representation of the conquest of all distant and exotic lands'. The display of these animals is for public pleasure and to reinforce enlightenment progress through scientific discovery, but it also contributes to colonial ideologies. The Menagerie in the Jardin des Plantes was typical in this respect, displaying animals from around the world. In the case of Australia this included wombats and a thylacine.

In the International Thylacine Specimen Database, Sleightholme and Ayliffe (2013: 91) note:

> In a report written by the Director of Mammals and Birds in 1891, Alphonse Milne-Edwards complained to the central administration that the 1890-1891 winter was especially cold and amongst the huge total of dead animals during this period were noted the two thylacines. In historic registers from the Menagerie, it is noted that the female died on the 6th of February 1891 and the male on the 27th March 1891. Both animals presumably died through exposure to the severe cold.

These were the only live thylacines ever exhibited in France and two of nine exhibited in mainland Europe (Sleightholme and Ayliffe 2013: 91). After their death, the remains of these thylacines went to the Museum as specimen numbers 1891-327 (skin and a skull) and 1891-61 (brain, viscera, and a skeleton). The brain is suspended in a jar on display in the Galerie de Paléontologie et d'Anatomie Comparée, and there is also a skeleton, skulls, and a single skeletal paw on display but these are from other individuals.

In La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues (Room of Extinct and Endangered Species) a different thylacine has been mounted and is on display. This specimen (1875-805) is a female thylacine accessioned in 1875. The International Thylacine Specimen Database attributes this specimen to the collector and naturalist Francis de Laporte de Castelnau, who was the French Consul in Melbourne from 1864 to 1877 (Sleightholme and Ayliffe 2013). To approach this specimen, one must first go through the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, a grandiose glass domed nineteenth century building (built in 1889) sitting at the top of the Jardin des Plantes. This building sustained significant damage during WWII and re-opened in 1994 with a unifying thematic focus on evolution (Asma 2003: 170). It is the jewel in the crown of the Muséum National d'Historie Naturelle complex. Through the centre of the main hall of the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution is a spectacular display – a menagerie of exotic taxidermy mounts. A veritable Noah's Ark containing giraffes, elephants, zebras, antelopes, and many other creatures large and small, arranged as if on parade. The Museum creates an immersive experience with clever lighting and sound effects. The calls of wild animals provide a sonic background for the museum experience and the lighting on the walls and roof fades in and out of a range of colours, bathing the collection in reds, blues, greens, purples. The lighting creates different tonal effects and evokes natural phenomena such as sunrise and sunset. At one point during my visit in 2022 the lighting and sound combined to recreate a rainstorm bathing the animals in blues and greys. It was so convincing that I assumed that a storm had engulfed the building.

*Thylacine mount in the La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues. Photo credit Anne Romeo.*

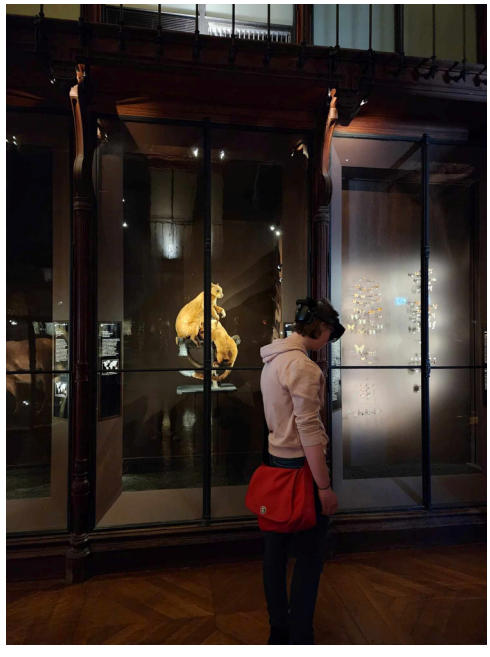
In contrast, the La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues is a dimly lit, parquet-floored room filled with traditional dark wood cabinetry. It contains 250 extinct or endangered animal and plant species. The room is sombre and is described by Claudia Cohen (2018: 126) as a 'sanctuary' suggesting a space of safety. The displays are stripped back, each mount presented against a black background, visually isolated by spotlighting, with minimal interpretive material about its status. In contrast to the display in the main hall, the La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues is neo-traditional: it is as much about the history of museums and collecting as it is about the species on display. The old cases and the organisation of species around the external walls and central displays reflects a history of museum display practices oriented for the viewer's curiosity and pleasure. Each taxidermied mount reflects the species thinking prevalent in museums in which each specimen stands in for its taxonomic type (see Chrulew 2011; Stark 2018). While both spaces are designed to facilitate scopophilia, their effect is different. The main hall, with its rainbow colours and life-like displays is designed to inspire awe, wonder, and pleasure. The extinction gallery, on the other hand, inspires reverence, sadness, and reflection. In contrast to the background soundtrack in the main hall, the La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues is a very quiet space, with high ceilings that further mute sound.

In the centre of the room is an ornate wall-sized clock. This clock, made in 1785 by the royal clockmaker Robert Robin, was commissioned by King Louis XVI as a gift to his wife, Marie Antionette. After the abolition of the monarchy in 1792, the clock was displayed in the Zoological Gallery of the Museum, first in the bird gallery and then in 1994, after renovations, in the La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues (see Jørgensen et al 2022: 1). The symbolism of the clock has been interpreted by various scholars such as Dolly Jørgensen, Libby Robin and Marie-Theres Fojuth (2022: 2) who read the clock as constructing a parallel between the end of the monarchy and the extinction of species:

> The clock behind glass is a physical reminder of the dramatic and violent end of a dynasty…the bodies behind glass are reminders of the dramatic and violent end of nonhuman bloodlines. Extinction interrupts the processes of time, death, and generations…

Valérie Bienvenue also reads the clock as a symbolic bridge between Versailles and extinction. She writes, 'its intrusive marking of time forms an acoustic reminder of the House of Bourbon and the royal menagerie at Versailles where some of these species originated – species ripped from their familiar habitat to serve as exotic spectacles' (Bienvenue 2022: 338).

La Salle des Espèces Menacées et des Espèces Disparues is currently the site for Revivre, through which the museum visitor can experience 'extinct animals in augmented reality.' Partnered with SAOLA, an 'augmented creation studio,' Revivre is explicitly designed to facilitate environmental sentiments in the viewer.[1] When I visit the Museum (October 2022) I am given headset and some very specific instructions – follow the prompts in the voiceover exactly, don't touch the headset, no sudden head movements. I look through the lenses, and a passenger pigeon appears to guide me into the augmented reality experience. I look up and a stellar sea cow and its pup cavort across the gallery ceiling. A thylacine walks across the top of a historical display case, housing the 1875 female mount. It yawns, stretches, and struts across the case before running off. The thylacine, like the other animals brought to life by Revivre, is charismatic. It is uncanny in its liveliness yet also cartoonish. All of the simulated animals appear to be aware of our presence. A flock of dodos approach me, waddling quizzically across the museum floor. At the end of the experience, the voiceover tells me to hold up my hand and the passenger pigeon comes to rest on my open palm, moving in concert with me. On the SAOLA website it states that the technologically enhanced experience of the collection 'aims to raise awareness so that the list of extinct species stops growing day after day.'[2] The information given in the voiceover is about human impact. Information on the Museum's website is even more pointed than that provided by SAOLA and notes that '[t]his experience also sheds light on current species suffering from anthropogenic pressure and tells us about the good practices of indigenous peoples from whom we can draw inspiration. It invites us to take another look at all the species presented in the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution.'[3]



*A young person participates in Revivre. Photo credit Anne Romeo.*

This experience is awe-inspiring and deeply affecting. It mobilises common emotions pertaining to extinction which occurs within a complex affective economy in which a range of negative emotions are expressed and exchanged: rage, hopelessness, fear, grief, anxiety, desolation,

trauma, loneliness. While these negative emotions attend to extinction, grief has emerged as a dominant affect in contemporary environmental discourse. We can see this in contemporary ecocritical work when, for example, Timothy Morton (2007: 185) writes that 'now is the time for grief to persist, to ring throughout the world'. Similarly, John Charles Ryan (2020: 190) frames the Anthropocene in relation to extinction as a time of 'profound loss and also of profound loneliness' in which we must find ways to grieve more-than-human lives. Judith Butler (2004a; 2004b) politicises grief by defining 'grievable lives' as those that are deemed worthy of grief in our culture and used to indicate who and what matters politically. Taking Butler's notion of grievability out of the anthropocentric frame, it can inform how we think about grieving extinction in a multi-species world. Butler insists that emotions can be public, shared and the basis of a politics. 'Many people think of grief as privitising, that it returns us to a solitary situation,' Butler (2004b: 19) writes, 'but I think it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for thinking a political community of a complex order'. The way in which emotions associated with extinction have been conceptualised and pathologised – as eco- and climate anxiety (Panu 2020), climate trauma and pre-traumatic stress disorder (Craps 2020a), Anthropocene disorder (Clark 2015) and solastalgia (Albrecht 2005) – as private emotions within individual psychology. However, as Butler reminds us, affect can resonate in particular spaces and situations, it has a public life, and it can be shared. The work of extending grievability to the more-than-human is ethically and politically urgent. As Stef Craps (2020b: 3) suggests, grieving for extinct species can 'galvanise us to take positive action on their behalf'. In Revivre this message is rendered explicit: when the passenger pigeon lands in my palm at the end of the sequence, extinction is literally in my hands.

The sequence of animals that appear and then disappear in front of me are ghostly renderings of animals that once were. Revivre is site specific. Central to the experience is the juxtaposition of the historical space (and the history of collecting and display more broadly) and the technologically mediated resurrection of species. This once still and somewhat stagnant room becomes animated, filled with illumination and movement. In this way augmented reality bridges the space between the inanimate and the animate, the dead and the 'living,' and the observer and the participant. While Revivre does still centre the gaze of the human and in some ways sustains the traditional expectation that natural science collections educate and entertain, it can also be read as a posthumanist intervention. As O'Key (2021: 636) suggests:

> the development of more-than-human or posthumanist curatorial practices promises not simply to transform the abiding anthroponormative gaze of natural history – a gaze which affirms the norms of human superiority – but to also offer an institutional coming-to-terms-with extinction, in which museums confront their own historic complicities with mass extinction.

Revivre invites critical reflection on the complicity of humans in extinction, and its site-specific nature invites us to consider the place of museums in this narrative with their history of collecting and display of exoticized, rare, and endangered animals. It also challenges the idea that the viewer is passive and renders them an active participant in both the experience, which includes movement and following instructions to access the next scene, and also positions humans as agents of change in the extinction crisis. Moreover, it creates space and time for the public to engage with extinction as a form of loss and one caused by human environmental impact. This is a sobering experience and one in which mourning extinct animals can be a shared experience for a museum-going public.

There is no doubt that museums can create a space in which negative emotions relating to human complicity in the extinction crisis can be experienced. This is important, because, as Lesley Head (2016: 167) reminds us, '[g]rief and other painful emotions – fear, anxiety, trauma – will be our companions on this journey [into the Anthropocene] – they are not something we can deal with once and move on from'. We need to take negative emotions seriously and to give them spaces in which to flourish. However, the case study of thylacine in this museum complex in Paris may also reveal a more complex emotional landscape for engaging with extinction. The final thylacine that I will encounter when I visit the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle complex is in the Jardin des Plantes and it is part of a carousel. The Dodo Manège ('Dodo Carousel') was opened in 1992 and the carousel rides take the

form of an incongruous set of endangered and extinct animals including a thylacine, a dodo, a horned turtle, a moa, a panda, a number of *Sivatherium*, and (rather incongruously) a triceratops. The carousel is ornate, and, in the style of French carousels, it is decorated with scenes from nature and, in particular, from the surrounding gardens. The Dodo Manège provides interpretive material designed to educate the public about the species it features and their sad demise. Yet it is a festive concoction of glossy colours and a spectacle for our pleasure. While it is an accessible display evoking simple carnival delights, it also has a camp aesthetic and trades in irony. It invites a playful, tactile, and participatory engagement with extinction. An entertainment for children, the Dodo Manège evokes the parade of animals in the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, out of context and out of time. Having journeyed through the museum, what can we make of this display?

*Dodo Manège, Paris. Photo credit: Anne Romeo.*

The Dodo Manège can be understood in relation to Nicole Seymour's work in which she brings queer theories of affect to bear on ecocriticism and environmental debates more broadly. A queer approach to environmentalism is useful, she insists, because queer theory and the context of environmental crisis share a preoccupation with bad feelings (Seymour 2018b: 236). Seymour (2018a: 5) is interested in dislodging the emotions that commonly attend environmental politics such as 'gloom and doom,' as well as 'guilt, shame, didacticism, prescriptiveness, sentimentality, reverence, seriousness, sincerity, earnestness, sanctimony, self-righteousness, and wonder'. In order to advance an alternative engagement with environmental crisis, Seymour (2018b: 236) reminds us that 'bad affect' has a second meaning, not just negative feelings but also inappropriate affects. She theorises bad environmentalism as 'environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities' (Seymour 2018a: 6). Bad environmentalism focuses on the inappropriate feelings that can arise in response to environmental culture, through humour, playfulness, joy, irreverence. Seymour, however, does not engage significantly with species extinction in her book *Bad Environmentalism* and indeed the concept gets pushed to its limit when considering species extinction. Nevertheless, the Dodo Manège is an excellent example of where bad environmentalism might be most effective.

It is easy to read the Dodo Manège as a carnivalesque display, in relation to the work of Mickail Bakhtin who theorised the carnivalesque. Based on the medieval carnival in which hierarchies of power are inverted – the jester becomes king – the carnival is where power relationships break down or are renegotiated. The carnival is also the site of festive laughter. This is a form of ambivalent laughter which has a particular purpose beyond revelry. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin (1984: 123) writes:

> Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naivete and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality. Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness. Such is the function of laughter in the historical development of culture and literature.

Laughter is, then, serious business. Within this framework it is a regenerative force, consistent with other approaches to laughter (such as Freud's) as a form of relief in which psychic tension is processed and released. The Dodo Manège provokes laughter through the juxtaposition of extinction (death) and play. It can be theorised as a form of incongruous laughter (such as in the work of Kant and Schopenhauer) in which we laugh because we encounter something that doesn't fit our expected patterns (see Morreall 1982: 245). This is exacerbated by the sense of surprise in arriving at this carnival ride next to the institutions that house and preserve the remains of so many extinct creatures.

The Dodo Manège illustrates the purpose of humour when deployed to make a serious point. To properly grapple with the extinction crisis, we need an affective repertoire that doesn't result in paralysis and inaction. As Seymour (2018a: 230) explains in relation to her work, we need 'alternatives to crisis discourse in an era of crisis fatigue'. The value of deploying comedy in relation to serious environmental crises is that it has the capacity to engage a wider and more diverse audience. No longer just preaching to the already convinced, it pulls others into environmental reflection. Comedy – and with it laughter, irony, camp, juxtaposition, play, surprise – also offers moments of participatory engagement. As Geo Takach (2022: 373) writes of environmental comedy:

> eco-comedy is not an end in itself, merely a means to one. It does not blunt our planetary blitzkrieg. And it certainly doesn't sugarcoat it. But it does offer new ways of seeing—new possibilities—as alternatives to the discursive fog polluting the public sphere. It both plays on and calls on our collective creativity, irreverence, mutuality, and perhaps the most primal quality demanded by our pivotal, cognitively dissonant, environmental moment: hope.

This hope, which may seem incongruous in relation to extinction, is a critical emotion for orienting to the future.

Museums are among the most significant sites through which the public comes face-to-face with extinction. They are also spaces in which public feelings about extinction, a complex and multivalent problem, can be worked through. What is the repertoire of emotions that attends extinction? How might these feelings help us to think and feel collectively about extinction? What impact might this have on our capacity to understand ourselves as located in a fragile and multi-species world? Additionally, is the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle emblematic of the shifting nature of museums to become more complex, participatory, political, and affecting? Museums undoubtably create a space for public grief but, as the Paris example shows, they may also give rise to a more complex emotional landscape in relation to extinction and this may well be useful for engaging the public to see extinction as a complex problem in which humans are deeply enmeshed. In this way they can embody Seymour's double sense of bad affect in which space is created for affects which are both negative and inappropriate. Looking at the various ways that a single extinct species is presented and consumed at a single cultural institution reminds us that museums have the capacity to hold space for a range of responses and in doing so can facilitate rich and complex environmental sentiments. As Fiona Cameron et al. (2015: 263) suggests:

> museums need to rely less on presenting audiences with information and more on creating and designing richer experiences. The emotions they aim at should have range and balance, encompassing joy, wonder and delight, rather than just pressing the buttons of fear and guilt.

The Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle is successful in delivering on Cameron's sense of the range and balance necessary to successfully engage people with serious environmental

problems. It therefore offers us new ways of seeing, thinking and feeling in relation to human impact and responsibility. Museums such as the excellent example in Paris are demonstrating how to remain relevant and salient to the public at a time of significant social and environmental change.

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**Notes**

1 Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, 'Experience: Revivre, Extinct Animals in Augmented Reality', Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle [n.d.]. https://www.mnhn.fr/en/experience/revivre-extinct-animals-in-augmented-reality, accessed 31 July 2023.

2 SAOLA, 'Revivre', SAOLA [n.d.]. https://www.saolastudio.com/en-gb/revivre, accessed 31 July 2023.

3 Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, 'Experience: Revivre, Extinct Animals in Augmented Reality'.

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